

Georgian parliamentary elections marred by confusion over voter lists

TBILISI, 3 November 2003 - The 2 November parliamentary elections in Georgia fell short of a number of international standards. Delays and confusion over voter lists contributed to a lack of public confidence in the governmental and parliamentary authorities' capacity to manage an effective and transparent election process, concluded the International Election Observation Mission in a statement issued today.

Although the election provided voters with a wide choice of candidates, unrealistic timelines and improvised, last minute decisions threatened to undermine the otherwise improved work of the Central Election Commission.

Some 450 international observers from 43 countries monitored the polls in one of the larger and longer election observation missions deployed.

"These elections have, regrettably, been insufficient to enhance the credibility of either the electoral or the democratic process," said Bruce George, Special Co-ordinator of the OSCE Chairman-in-Office, leading the Short-Term Observation Mission.

"We believe that the people of this country are entitled to a better-run election system and protection of the right to vote, as sadly was not apparent yesterday. Urgent attention must be paid to training presiding election officials and addressing shortcomings in the system," added Tom Cox, Head of the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly's Delegation.

Demetrio Volcic, Head of the Delegation of the European Parliament, said: "Some last minute decisions by the Central Election Commission were inappropriate and evident of a haphazard approach. The use of different voter lists reduced confidence in the integrity of the data and lacked transparency."

"The irregularities and delays in the voting process on polling day reflect a lack of collective political will and administrative capacity for the conduct of the elections. The counting, tabulation and appeals process will now be crucial to building public confidence," concluded Julian Peel Yates, who is heading the Long-Term Observation Mission of the OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR).

Deployment of security forces in four districts and numbers of unauthorized persons in polling stations added to a notion of interference in the election process. More positively, transparency was maintained in most areas and many Precinct Election Commissions worked hard to overcome difficulties and attempted to follow correct voting and counting procedures.

The International Election Observation Mission recognised improvements, including the new Unified Electoral Code which provides an adequate framework for holding

democratic elections if implemented impartially, and the increased transparency of the work of the Central Election Commission.